



CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

SUBJECT: The Indo-Tibetan Boundary

The natural geographic boundary between India and Tibet in the Assam region, where the Sino-Indian border dispute currently is hottest, is the watershed formed by the crest ridge of the Great Himalaya range, highest of several mountain ranges in the Himalayan system. This same crest ridge for the most of its length forms a natural boundary between Tibet and Bhutan, Sikkim, Nepal, and northern India. (Maps attached)

The Great Himalaya range lies in remote and geographically difficult terrain. Thus, while the main peaks of the range have been triangulated and explored, the actual line of the crest has never been surveyed in detail, and the precise identification of any specific point on the line is not a matter of record.

The McMahon line, drawn in 1914, follows the crest ridge of the Great Himalaya range between Bhutan and Burma as closely as it was then possible to locate it

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on existing maps of Assam. In places where the crestline is broken by transverse valleys and ridges, the line was drawn to follow natural watersheds of lower altitude. No detailed ground survey of the line has been made, however, and no border markers have been placed along it. Accordingly, there is room for disagreement on the specific location of the frontier line.

The Chinese Communist claim to territory in Assam extending from the Himalayan crest nearly 100 miles down the southern slopes to the foothills at the edge of the Brahmaputra river floodplain is one based on ancient Tibetan jurisdiction over the area and not on any natural boundary. This same claim was made--but could not be backed up--by Imperial China and Republican China prior to the Communist takeover. Despite the fixing of the McMahon Line in 1914, the British never actually brought the tribal highland territory south of the line under administrative control and independent India has done so only in very recent years.

ALLEN W. DULLES
Director

Attachment
(2 maps)

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